

THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

VIPIN RAI

The winter  
holidays

A NOVEL

THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

# *The winter holidays*

By VIPIN RAI

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## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

### AUTHORS NOTE

I SINCERELY HOPE THAT YOU THOROUGHLY ENJOY THIS WORK, WHICH HAS BEEN CREATED WITH GREAT LOVE AND DEDICATION. THIS NOVEL TELLS THE STORY OF A TEENAGE BOY, ALLOWING YOU TO DELVE INTO THE NARRATIVE THROUGH HIS THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES. IF YOU APPRECIATE THE WORK, I WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF YOU COULD SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHATSAPP, INSTAGRAM, OR ANY PLATFORM OF YOUR CHOICE. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MENTION ME, AS I WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO READ YOUR PRAISE AND RESPOND ACCORDINGLY.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ IT COMPLETELY.

VIPIN RAI

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Part

One

Arden

## Chapter 1

My mother died when I was four or five. I can barely remember anything, not even her face, but her silhouette is secured in my heart somewhere. My memory vanished with my growth.

At present, I am sixteen and spend most of my time thinking about how beautiful she was and how caring she was for me.

I don't even have any memories of her; not a single picture was left to even imagine, but whenever I visualize, I see a beautiful, long-black haired woman with utmost love for me, a beautiful shine on her face, a natural glow, and a pure, lovely soul inside her pretty skin ,she is epitome of elegance and beauty .

I spend most of my nights on the roof with these thoughts, and this was the same thoughtful night for me.

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I am on my roof, sitting on a chair that is older than my age—less comfortable but my companion, just like the other companions of mine: notebooks, pens, and books. They are part and parcel of my life, and the staples of my life mean everything.

I have been gazing at the moon for an hour. Its beautiful shine, I am describing my mother's beauty into the pages in the form of the moon's beauty .the moon elegance are just as mere reflection of her radiance.

Then suddenly, the sound, or more truly, an unpleasant loud noise came across the terrace from the main entrance door. Someone at the door was shouting loudly; it was a very usual and monotonous event for me. I held all my stuff in my hand and made my way downstairs, but first, before going down, I entered the second floor.

Respectfully dropped all my stuff on the bed, and then reached the main door of the house. This house has two stories: the first is the ground floor with a single long sofa, and the second is my personal room with a kitchen and the terrace, my favorite place in this structure. I opened the gate, and without taking a single look at who was behind the door, I rushed upstairs without waiting for the person behind the door to come inside. I knew who was behind it; always one person at this late hour, my father, a wholly uncontrollable drunk man with the unmistakable smell of booze. While on the stairs, I heard, “Arden! Bring

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water; I didn't tell you to do this every day!" This unpleasant command reached my ears. I reach with water there .

He is trying to gaze at my pupils, but my head is down, so it is making it hard for him to look. My hands are trembling. I am indifferent towards him. He is well-known to me but has always felt like a stranger surrounded by the common walls only. He accidentally drops the glass, which strikes the ground very hard and scatters into many little pieces everywhere on the floor. Eventually, one of the splinters embeds in my foot's skin. I didn't shout or jump in pain; I rushed upstairs to the terrace without saying any words. Again, I start my thoughtful journey with the fleeting memory of my mother with my companion chair. It's late at night already; the dark, enormous black blanket with printed dots is blinking continuously.

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## CHAPTER 2

I woke up on my bed, staring at the kitchen window, which works as a clock for me. Loud

locking the door noise came to my ear but actually it was not noise for me it was very pleasing sound for me .he was going to his job, he didn't call me to lock the door instead of that he always locked the door from outside and threw the key inside through the lower space between the door and floor.

I stand on my feet to escape my body from slothfulness, I steps towards the kitchen, wash my face, look in the fridge, there are two egg rolls he made for me or left. I carry them to bed and start to enjoy them with my book. I am reading the kite runner by Khaled Hosseini. He writes very creatively and boldly I completed my book half and my meal full, then I washed the plate and put that at its place with ease.

After I am done with my daily morning monotonous routine.

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I went to the terrace holding my half complete book, pen and notebook.

I spent my full day there, there is no one who can see me because in which area I am living there are people who just lie in rooms and come outside to work only, it's kind of an isolated place and me, I only went down when he calls me to eat, sometimes in night, when he didn't drunk at all means very few days.

While strolling with my book in hand and the sun as my morning companion, I witnessed a moment at the abundant house in front of my house, just skipping one house lane in between. This was the house whose height is greater than the house I live in. The balcony of that house is at the same horizontal level as my terrace. My eyes were drawn there; there was an old woman and a truck unloading heavy furniture. Probably, she or her family is newly living here, shifting in. This house is very close to me; it was previously owned by a man named Mr. Vie.

He was a corporate man, always busy. He moved from here in the past, and I can't forget, as I never got a chance to meet him the last time. He was a very kind and good man; he gifted me all the books I had. He taught me to read and write. I spent my whole year in 2002 with him, and then in January 2003, he left and moved away. He is the second and last person with whom I interacted this much .

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He calls me whenever he finds me alone on my terrace to read classic literature and spend time with him in his house. I spent my whole day there, and when the day turned into night, I went back to my house terrace.

After him, this house never became rented, and now I think he sold his house. The new owners shifted their stuff into the house. I am reading my book, and whenever I finish a page and turn it, my eyes automatically find a way to look at that house with its old and cracked windows.

After reading for hours, I tore a page from my notebook and started to write on it. I wrote a poem, but before I could complete that poem, a miserable sound came from the door, and I dropped that page on the chair, which fell onto the terrace floor due to the wind at the corner.

I went downstairs, opened the gate, rushed upstairs, and started to read my book again. I totally forgot to complete that poem. While I was sitting on a chair and reading, I heard a sound from below; it was coming from the kitchen the sound of cooking . I think he wasn't drunk today therefore he was cooking instead of muttering continuously .

Arden ! He calls me from the stairs

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“Coming” I replied

After spending a few minutes there when I think he finally went to the sofa I went to the middle room .

He cooked the veg rice .

Tasty, I said to air and went to sleep on bed .My head is towards the window , the summer is ending now and winter is coming and I hate winters , there are many reasons for it but I didn’t want to think about them .

.....

## Chapter 3

Today I rose up early from my bed , in my room there is no clock but I used to estimate accurate time by the window outside view . I did the same It was 9 am when I woke up .

Currently I am standing near the window gazing outside . Today ,it has less shine than usual , the day is less bright I think because of winter but ignoring that I am going to the terrace .

It is a solitude routine of mine , strolling on the terrace sitting on the chair of the terrace , reading and writing.

After freshening myself I went to the terrace and again I witnessed a moment in that house in front of my house skipping one house lane , that same old woman now cleaning the floor of the house . Suddenly my eyes locked at the view of the broken window into which a girl around the same age I was , awakening from the bed , For a few seconds my eyes were locked but when her eyes came in my direction . I suddenly feel a little awkward and I move myself back and start to gaze at book pages .

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When I end up strolling in the back direction I turn myself in the direction of that house . Now this time that girl is standing in her balcony, long black haired , natural glow holding glass of water in one hand and looking for something down the road .

Suddenly, her gaze meets mine, and I am overwhelmed by an unfamiliar feeling that I cannot quite identify. This moment also carries a sense of awkwardness as I find myself staring at her. I lower my head as our eye contact lasts for a few seconds. My attention then shifts to the door, where someone is locking it and throwing the key inside. I proceed to the middle room to have a bite to eat. Upon arriving in the middle room, I place my book on the bed and take a moment to rest. After a brief respite, I rise to my feet and glance at the refrigerator, noting the presence of bread and an egg, which I then use to prepare an omelet sandwich for myself. After eating and allowing myself a short break, I pick up the book to continue reading, yet I find it perplexing that I am unable to concentrate on anything since this morning. I sigh, expressing my frustration aloud, and decide to take a brief nap in hopes of alleviating my headache.

Dark....dark...dark....

## Chapter 4

*7:00 o'clock*

It was evening when I woke up from bed. By the window view, I can surely say it's maybe 7 or 7:30 PM, dark, sun shading the sky into a reddish fade. It is a beautiful sunset. Isn't it? I asked myself and I replied to myself by shrugging. I looked at the balcony from the kitchen window. The beautiful winter sunset.

The knob's sound came from the downstairs door, but this time there was no miserable sound. I am wondering how it is possible. I am thinking this until I reach the door. I open the door and again, without waiting a second to answer or anything, I went upstairs.

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When I reached my final destination, I sat on my roof chair. Thinking about something but not having any idea of it, suddenly some sound came from the kitchen; something was cooking, I can assure by the odor that was spreading into the air. I don't know the reason behind this, but it was pretty good. I don't believe in gods, but the voice flipped and finally, God woke up, I said. This day had something different, some kind of something. I stared at the stars and again said to the moon that really it was a good day with good faith.

I started mumbling while sitting on the chair for hours. Then, with my closed eyes, a small piece of snow fell from the blue infinity.

“Arden! Come to eat!” he called loudly.

I remained silent for a few minutes and then stepped downstairs into the middle room. I reached the kitchen; hot paella was there. Today is full of unexpected glimpses, and when my eyes went to the corner of the room, I was shocked, standing with my mouth open. There was a thick white blanket. I felt the blanket with my hands; it was so soft. I covered my whole body in it and

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grabbed all my food. Lying on the bed under half the blanket, I was enjoying my paella , and the taste was absolutely awesome.

After an hour, with sleepy eyes in warm comfort, I got into a sweet dream.

“Good night, sweet dreams,” I said to myself.

This winter may be coming with white and bright...

# Chapter 5

*“This winter may be coming with white and bright.”*

My eyes are closed, but I am awake and can feel my surroundings through my ears. He was here in the kitchen cooking. He seems completely harmless, quiet, still, but not always; most of the time, it's totally the reverse. Sometimes he becomes a sharp, very hot knife blade, and no matter which side it is, it causes hurt to the person.

I closed my eyes until he went downstairs, and when I heard the sound of the locking door, I stood on my feet and went to the kitchen. He didn't eat; he just cooked and went to work.

Capriciously, my gaze goes outside the window; there is quite a darkness outside, loudly announcing it's 6:00 a.m., and the peak winter is on its way.

It was hot, sizzling noodles he cooked. I took it all into a small bowl, and one noodle stuck together to the bed.

I am under a blanket. My head is the only part outside, staring at the plain ceiling of the room; it's totally plain white and fine. Suddenly, I notice the soft ray of the sun kissing my forehead.

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I went upstairs with my companions to meet my other companion, the sun, on the first winter day of this year.

It's a lovely, beautiful day; the skies are crystal clear, and the sun is making the beautiful day more and more tranquil and soothing.

I sit on the chair while holding a book in my hands; I start reading it from where I ended last time.

I am at the end of the pages of the book; only a few pages remain. I slow down my reading speed because it was the last book I had to read, and then there would be nothing left to read.

All the books I have were gifted by Uncle Vie. Every Sunday, he gifts me three books, and I collect them. I was merely capable of finishing one in a week, but a few days before he left, he gave me 25 books. He probably knew he would never return again to give me any more; he never told me that he was leaving. I think it was because I am kind of fragile.

I remember the first time he read me the classic novel about mother-son love. I ended up crying; my eyes became wet, and the last pages of the book got wet with my tears.

I slow down my speed, but I know it doesn't help.

"Not a beautiful winter," I tell oneself. "I will get bored without books like I used to in the old days in the room. What are the things I can do besides them? Just writing. But my hands only

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know how to write when it comes to his mood; without that, it's like hand and finger exercise on blank papers."

After merely spending 30 minutes with the last pages of the book, it comes to an end; it was the last page—end of a beautiful phrase. I have read it too many times, and now there is nothing.

Darkness ruled all over the blue sky, symbolizing its victory, and now it's dark everywhere.

I spend my 3-4 hours just sitting, holding a pen. I don't know when I started holding it, and there is a notebook on my lap. I am gazing at that balcony and writing, but I don't know when I started. It's very strange.

# Chapter 6

The next day

Morning

I wake up and raise my hand to rub my eyes to see the walls around me. He has already left because it's late. I can see the sun rays coming through the window, showcasing the time to go to the terrace. I stand on my feet, and as I touch the book to carry it to the terrace, my mind strikes; now there are no words, no books, no humans in my life, and no journey. I have never gone far from this brick-and-cement structure. I haven't met many people in my life, less than the figures I think I have. With that thought, I pull my hand back from that book and hold the notebook and pen. I am almost going, almost, but suddenly my eyes catch sight of her from the kitchen window; that girl on her balcony. Standing, combing her long black hair, which shines with the rays of the splendid sun. I step back and hold that book I am about to leave behind. I quicken my pace to the terrace. I reach it, but by then she has already left. Now I am standing, facing downward and muttering continuously about something. I

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suddenly realize the pain in my right hand, which is because I punched my hand against the chair hard in an open-eyed dream. So that pain pulls me back into reality again. I lift my head with the intention of sitting on the chair, but when I do, she is there, standing and smiling at me. I return that sweet smile. She doesn't stop; she just keeps smiling and looking at me. I am doing the same. Suddenly, that smiling freeze moment is broken by her mother's call, her mother calling her so loudly that her voice reaches my ears too. She waves a quick bye towards me and quickly goes back inside before I can return her bye with my own. I remain in the same position for a few moments, lost in inevitable thoughts; her smile. I have never seen mountains, grasslands, or any of the world's beautiful wonders, but I think seeing them would feel the same as seeing that smile. I spend the remaining time just sitting, and when the unpleasant sound comes from downstairs at the front door, I return once again to the darkness from the bright.

Dark.....dark...and dark ...

# Chapter 7

The next morning

I am dreaming, and when I open my eyes, it flicks again into a dream, but this time with open eyes. I love this dream because it is very beautiful and full of contentment, or I hate it because I know it will never come true. I am a little confused about it. It was as beautiful as if I didn't try to make it real, then it always hurts me like guilt—the guilt of not trying.

I start to think about her, her eyes and the beauty they hold. What is her name? The question struck suddenly in my mind; I don't know her name. Her name, I think, would also be the prettiest meaning. My mind is not free for one second; her smile is the only thing occupying my thoughts. Her smile—her beauty just vanishes by her smile in my world. Her lips are totally alive, active, blooming, naturally shining, and luminous in my dark thoughts, ideal for her face, purely faultless, seemingly newly born, zero days old, fresher than the winter breeze and colder than this beautiful white winter. Its beauty is indescribable by my words. The sublime lips and the splendid shine of them, her face and lips are a match made in heaven, and more than that,

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her bold black eyes make it more immaculate and beautiful.

After these long thoughts of her beauty, I end my thinking journey because I know it is an immense subject.

I move from my bed, finally making a move. I step to the kitchen window to look outside. It is already evening; the sky is scattering red color all over, and in the middle of the enormous red sky, there is a tiny round circle like a clock. For some fresh air, I go to the terrace, and then I stroll between the breezes. The wind is like pulling me in an undesirable direction, like a mother pulling her son towards home while he wants to explore the world, buy some toys, and seek love in the open air. My stroll ends with the monotonous unpleasant noise from the door below.

# Chapter 8

I step slowly to open the door, and when I reach it, I do so without checking who is behind it. However, his inevitable booze breath always assaults my nostrils; it's stronger than usual. As I move towards the stairs, he suddenly grips my hands tightly, painfully. It's as if there is no escape from it. No escape. I wonder if it is the same feeling animals experience when they are kept behind iron bars: a loss of freedom.

I am immobile at that moment. He shouts at me for water and hospitality. His eyes are completely bloodshot, and the whole room is filled with the odor of his beer; he is holding another beer bottle in his other hand. I am not listening; it all feels like a silent scene to me. My ears are incapable of processing it; the noise has a higher frequency than what my ears can handle. In the next second, I realize my hands are free now, but they feel stuck in the air. I rush to the middle room. His mouth is continuously muttering something in anger and rage, either abusing someone or me.

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I don't get it because my brain has momentarily stopped listening, as if it wants to save me from the killing words. When I finally enter the center of the middle room, nearly in the kitchen, my heart relaxes a little. He was shouting loudly for water and a glass for beer. I bend down with a glass and water; my hands are totally shaking, and my eyes are locked on them. He has already opened the beer and is drinking it; the bottle opening is in his mouth. He drinks it near the end in one sip, only one.

I am preparing myself to rush to the terrace slowly, but before it, something unpredictable happens there.

Trembling hands, splashes of water, the glass falling from my hands, his red bursting eyes, glass shards all over, someone's blood on the floor, absence of a beer bottle in his hand, fear, rage, noises, some old haunting memories...

I lock the terrace door tightly and stand there for minutes pushing the door against it. Then I am in my chair, tasting something salty, I realize. The sky has some differences today. Tonight's night sky has drastically changed suddenly. It has a moon that is not shining; there is no blinking in the stars. Everything looks stuck: air, clouds, moon, stars—everything in their position. I glance at the moon again. It's looking like the moon has lost its beauty and the sun behind it has been replaced by the darkest spherical thing, and because of that, the moon is also not shining—it's reflecting the darkness of that dark sphere

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to my world. This night looks like an imitation of my past. I feel a vacuum around me, no oxygen, only darkness, like every matter from my surroundings has lost its mass and volume.

To protect myself from it, I close my eyes.

Splendid bright whiteness is everywhere; the dazzling is the reason I can't open my eyes. A beautiful aroma is everywhere. My bare foot feels something very soft and fragile. The whole volume is filled with some kind of divine refuge. I bow my head and gradually open my eyes. The ground is blossoming—beautiful flowers everywhere. When I lift my head to see straight, the cozy dazzling makes it hard, but I manage it. I see my mother, a bright kind of silhouette, her long black hair is riding in the air. She is very beautiful with pristine skin and beautiful lips and eyes I can see from here.

She is very far from me, saying something, but her voice isn't reaching my ears; however, the voice is sweet and very uniform, relaxing at the same time.

It's like everything but nothing at the same time. Like sometimes you feel very bright without any sun in your life...

## Chapter 9

A snowflake from the sky fell on my cheek. I opened my eyes and stretched my hands wide open. I am on my chair. I slept here last night and am still here now in this winter.

I found my whole body trembling back and forth; my nose became red from the cold. My teeth started chattering, and I began to rub my hands against each other to generate some warmth.

My body is becoming pale from the cold wind, but going down was worse in my imagination until he left. I quickened my rubbing speed; suddenly, the warmth-causing sound came to my ears. My head turned in the direction of the sound. It came from that balcony; she was there, standing and holding a cup of tea or coffee with both hands. I didn't understand what she said just then, but whatever it was, her voice held warmth and sweetness. Looking at the hot steam rising from the cup gave me a little warm feeling; I don't know how it was possible, but it happened.

She stared at me and raised her eyebrows at me twice.

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'Ah, just a daily routine yoga,' I stopped rubbing my hands and said.

'I think your yoga makes you cold,' she said, taking a sip from her tea or coffee.

'Yeah, I think so too,' I muttered.

Her mother called her again with a loud voice that reached my ears too. She gestured with her two little fingers to wait. When she left, I increased my rubbing speed; the temperature was very low, especially in the morning. However, despite this painful temperature, the day looked very beautiful and divine. She came back with happy energy, saying, 'This winter isn't beautiful?' and smiled.

'Yeah, it is.'

'This is my favorite season. Mainly during this period, the winter holidays, my parents left for America. Now I am alone and independent. My mother just called me for a last goodbye,' she said loudly this time because her parents had left, I think.

She was very happy to be alone and independent at that moment. I found a smile on her face every time I saw her.

'What's your name?' she asked; her voice was very sharp and sweet. She raised her voice but kept that sweetness.

'Arden, and yours?'

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'Gwen, my name is Gwen,' she said, looking very happy as if she were jumping inside. 'Sweet name,' I said.

'Yeah, I know, but yours is sweet too, Arden. It's unique and very sweet.' I remained silent, trying to find words, but she interrupted me. 'Are you a reader?' she asked.

'Yes, I read books; I like them.'

'It's sweet again; we are very similar.'

'Do you like writing? Do you write?' she asked two questions at the same time. She seemed very interested in everything.

'Yeah, I write, and I also like it. What about you?'

'I love writing but like reading more.' Suddenly, a low sound came from the ground; it was faint, but it reached my ears. He is leaving.

'Have your winter holidays started?' she asked. 'Yeah, my winter holidays started yesterday,' I lied, feeling guilty for lying for the first time. It just spilled from my mouth, and then I continued the conversation.

Gradually, our conversation grew longer, from the terrace to the balcony, where her words were endless, while mine remained in my heart. We ended our talk when she realized my body was now trembling harder, which I completely ignored. My mind had no space for it.

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'When the sun rises,' she said, and without waiting for an answer, she waved to me. I returned the wave. I went into the middle room, boiled some water, and freshened up. After that, I started to write. I began to tell my mother about her—the same long black shiny hair, sweet voice, bold beautiful refuge eyes, that same beautiful face...

I opened my eyes, which were not closed, but it's something I can't explain to myself. I rushed to the terrace when I noticed the reddish sky; it was late now.

When I arrived, she was there, arms folded as if upset, but when her eyes met mine, they quickly changed to something more joyous, and her smile returned to her face.

'Oh, I am very, very sorry for being late; I just got caught up in something,' I said apologetically.

"Hey, don't be sorry. Just come next time before the time," she said and laughed.

"What are you busy with?" she asked.

"I'm writing, and I got lost in it. It happens to me," I replied.

"Oh, that sounds adventurous, getting lost in writing. I want to experience that too," she said, like she was a child.

She started talking, and until the sky changed its color to black, she didn't stop. She told me about her family, about herself, her hobbies, and everything. I felt like I was reading her, but I wasn't really reading her. She was very energetic while

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conveying her thoughts and words, conveying many things with her words. In the dark, she said my face was now hard for her to see, so we continued the next morning with my life and my story.

For me, her face was very crystal clear, somehow, in the dark. We were both leaving when suddenly her voice stopped me.

"Wait a minute," she said. I turned back to her. She went into her room and then returned to the balcony, tossing something to me. It struck my terrace floor. "Oh, you have to catch it, Arden; it's my watch , not forgot to come in the morning.

Good night," she said. Then, without waiting, she left, but I said quickly, "Good night, sweet dreams."

# Chapter 10

The next morning

He was gone when I woke up. I freshened up. My stomach was feeling empty, so I opened the fridge door; there were some apples and bananas. I took some of them.

I went to the terrace, and she was already there.

“Always first,” she said, smiling and glowing. I noticed whenever she smiles, her cheeks glow. Then again, it felt like a therapy session for me, totally unlike my whole previous life. Her words—there was a new subject of gossip every hour, and the transition between subjects was very smooth.

I failed every time to notice the change of topic, but it kept changing. We talked the whole day, only taking a small break in the afternoon and then continuing until night.

“It’s 11:00 PM,” she said with surprise.

“We talked a lot,” I said.

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“No, we talked less. I think this day is short or something.”

“Maybe”

Have you ever lived a short day?”

“No, not short...but very long days and night, many times.”

She remained silent, as if trying to read my mind or something, and then she smoothly changed the topic.

“What do you write about? I want to read it,” she said.

“I don’t actually know what I write, but I think you won’t like it.”

“Why not? You can’t say that before I read it all. You have to give it to me.”

“Say okay,” she said, taking a little pause. “Okay,” I replied.

“It’s late; I think you want to sleep. Goodnight tomorrow morning,” she said after some silence while staring at the moon.

“Goodnight,” I replied.

I went downstairs to the middle room under the blanket. He didn’t come home today. This surprised me; he always comes, but he didn’t come today but it was a very Blissful day.

# Chapter 11

This morning

I woke up early because he wasn't at home, so I was free. I freshened up and went to the terrace; the winter breeze was completely calming.

December was bringing less winter, but it was beautiful nonetheless. I waited for her while sitting on a chair. I had nothing to read, so I spent my time with her watch, noticing the movement of the hour hand. It was very hard to observe any movement in it, but it was moving. She finally came; she saw me before I could say anything.

Waiting, she said,

'No... I was... Yeah, waiting,' I said.

She smiled again. It was a very beautiful smile, always holding the same amount of love and beauty, even more than the previous time.

Our conversation between the terrace and balcony started; it went long.

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Then she suddenly realized and stopped, then said, ‘Hey, what about your daily routine?’

‘I mostly read books and write,’ I said and remained silent.

‘Only that?’ she said.

‘Yeah, but my books are finished now.’

‘Oh, why don’t you buy new ones?’

‘I don’t go far from home, nowhere, my close friend gifted me all the books and now he disappeared.’

‘But why don’t you go outside?’

‘I don’t know; I probably don’t like it.’

‘Wait, I have something for you,’ she said and went inside her home through the balcony door. Then she returned again, holding a hardcover book in her hand.

‘Hey, catch; I’m throwing it!’ She threw it into the air, but it did not come near; it just crossed the tiny house between us and fell onto the road near my house.

‘Oh, I didn’t throw it with enough force!’

‘Wait, I’ll come, take it.’ I rushed downstairs; the key was on the floor. I grabbed that key and tried to open the gate; it was stuck. I tried four times, and on the fourth try, it opened. I grabbed the book from the road and locked the door again.

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Then we talked again, but it went so deep this time. She asked about my family, and time vanished with my words, not hers. I told her all about my mother's beauty and my mother's similarity with her. Everything. I never felt that light. She waved goodbye, but before her goodbye reached me, someone slammed the door. I waved her goodbye quickly and went to open the door. He came home after two days. He was more drunk than ever.

He was a nightmare of mine with open eyes. Dark... dark... dark...

## Chapter 12

I woke up late today. Tonight was very miserable; he brought two or three beer bottles with him, and the whole night was filled with abusing, muttering, and shouting.

I busied myself in her given book; it was Alcestis by Euripides. I read it all at night. It was a great play. The story concerns the imminent death of King Admetus, who is advised that he will be allowed to live if he can find someone willing to die in his place. Alcestis, his wife, gives up her life before she realizes that the fact and manner of her dying will blight his life.

I opened the fridge door, and there was nothing new, only remaining fruits. So I started to reserve them for the future. I only ate one banana. I went to the terrace; small snowflakes were now coming from the skies more continuously. She is wide open with her arms, feeling the winter.

White is my favorite color; yours? She asked while relaxing and calming. I wonder how much humans are opposite to others, totally different. What color? She cut into my thoughts.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I don't know, I said.

What color comes to your mind when you think about peace and contentment?

Is it work? I wonder.

Yes, it works; just try it when you are free and alone.

We talked about many things, and the day also went like an hour. My life feels like heaven.

She told me about Christmas; it was coming after 10 days on December 25. She told me how it was celebrated in different ways in different countries, about its religious significance and many more.

At night, we went to sleep late; he didn't come home today either. So we talked late into the night about winter.

After 10 days ...

Ten days... I didn't feel how it went. Now she has become the first living companion of mine. We talk daily; it has become more of a routine. Sometimes I wake up from her call; her sweet melodic voice brings me out of my dreams.

We used to talk late into the night about me, about her, about the world.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

Some days he comes at night, but mostly there is a gap of one or two days, and whenever he comes, he has become more of an alcoholic. But in the last 10 days, his face has nearly vanished from my mind.

I opened the fridge door. My reserved fruits. Now I can't get cooked food for the last 12 days, and I am eating fruits. I am reserving them more safely. I went to the terrace after eating one fruit from them.

She was not on her terrace.

First, I muttered, and then I sat on a chair, waiting for her appearance, but she didn't come. I observed how incomplete her balcony looks without her glowing smile.

I waited for a long time but she didn't come. Then suddenly, it struck me; it was Christmas today, and we talked about it last night. Probably she went somewhere to celebrate in one of the ways she told me. I went into my middle room. I don't know why, but I felt upset. I started to write; I don't know what, but I wrote many things.

I heard the knob from downstairs; I think He came today finally after two days. I went very slowly to open the door. I grabbed the key from the floor and opened the lock of the door, but it didn't open. It was stuck; this has been happening for many days.

It wasn't opening; It needs repair, I said in a lower voice.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I am Gwen, not him, the sound came from the door behind.

I felt totally lost in something; she is here.

You are here? I said, a smile coming over my face.

Yes, I brought something for you; today is Christmas. If you open this fast, then I can present it to you.

It was old and not repaired. Let me try, I said.

I tried to open it; I pulled it with all my force, but it was stuck very badly.

Let me try to push from this side, she said. Yeah, I think it will work. She also tried many times, but the door was rigid. Now we were both leaning against the door, her outside and me inside. We both talked while resting; she told me she had gone to purchase a gift for me. She explained her journey today.

Hey, there is enough space, she said suddenly.

I remained silent, not knowing what she was referring to.

Then she pushed some glittery boxes from the space between the door and floor. There was not only one; she pushed a lot of gifts for me. After she finished,

Now it's your turn, she said.

What do you have for me? She said without waiting for my reply.

"No, I didn't think about it," I said.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

“Arden, you have to remember your diaries I want to read them all, so give me them all,” she said in a teaching way.

“Wait, I’ll bring all of it for you.” We both exchanged our gifts; She said to unwrap the gifts at 12 o’clock. I am resting in my middle room, staring at the watch. When finally the small hand reaches 12, I open all the boxes, and there are pens, books, and a lot of diaries. I grab one diary and a pen from it. I write: ‘ my Halcyon days, her winter holidays ‘

## Chapter 13

I slept while writing about the winter days and this beautiful December. I am just in a heavy dream, but the slamming of the front door broke my dream.

I stood up on my feet and went to open it. It didn't open again until he kicked at a corner. He was in very bad condition; my glance witnessed it. I didn't just rush in without waiting; I waited for him to come inside.

His lips were very red because of blood from his mouth, he was smelling very bad, and his clothes were full of dirt and wet. He went directly into the bathroom; I closed the front door, and I heard the sound of vomiting; he was vomiting very badly and for a long time. I was stuck there. When he finally came outside, I was just standing near the gate. He had more blood on his lips, and his shirt had also become red.

‘Go upstairs and hand me a towel,’ he said.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

His words were trembling. I went upstairs, my gaze went to the bathroom floor; there was a yellow and reddish mixture of blood and many things; it was very vulnerable.

I reached the middle room and took out a towel from the almirah. In this almirah, one of its drawers or cells was locked. I have never seen inside it. I dropped my thoughts and went down to hand him the towel.

He was preparing for a bath; his body needed it. I took my last glance at him and went back to the middle room kitchen. I looked at her balcony; she was not there; probably, she woke up late today because of last night.

I put myself in a blanket for a little rest and completed my dream. His footsteps broke my weak initial dream. He was coming into the middle room. He entered, went directly to the kitchen, and started to find something to cook, and then he suddenly fell on the ground; his head struck very hard. I rose up to support him, but I stopped when I went near him. His hand was raised in the air like it wanted someone's hands, but I don't know why my hands didn't become those hands; they didn't want to be. He lowered his hand and, without standing, just went to one side and leaned against the wall. My lips felt like they were collapsing together and did not want to free each other. He gestured for water; I held a glass, filled it with water, and brought it to him. It was the first time I saw his hand shaking. Finally, I broke my lips and released my tongue.

'Let me cook something for us,' I said.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

He nodded.

I had never made anything heavy in the kitchen; I started to cut some veggies I found in the fridge. I knew nothing about what I was going to cook, but he seemed to think I was done with cutting, so he started to narrate to me how to cook, step by step, in a very low-pitched voice. While I was cooking, she came onto her balcony.

I said nothing, just passed a smile; she also said nothing, but her lips formed a pattern as if she were saying, ‘Your father is there,’ she asked me. I nodded after I realized. She flicked her eyes and stayed there until the food finally cooked; my behind just vanished for me.

She waved bye when I was done cooking. We both ate; it was stew, very delicious. I finished my stew before he could, so I stood up and went upstairs, leaving him in the middle room. I sat on the chair; she wasn’t there, so I waited for her. I started to read a book, and after finishing one page, I looked at her balcony, but every time it gave me some kind of upsetness. I didn’t get when I fell asleep, but when I opened my eyes, it was already dark everywhere. I looked straight; she wasn’t there. I went into the middle room; he was sleeping on my bed under the blanket.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I went to the terrace again and sat on the chair. I started to read from where I remembered last time. The sky turned darker gradually; now it's hard to see the words on the paper clearly. So I closed the book. My eyes were straight, and when I removed the book, she was coming into her balcony while yawning and stretching. She probably woke up recently from sleep. She rubbed her eyes and raised her eyebrows because I was staring at her; I shrugged.

‘Did you start reading my diary?’ I asked.

‘Yeah, there are many; I started from that blue one, but I only read one page, and then I came into the balcony; you were sleeping at that time, so I stood there for some time but A few times I went back, and then I fell into a dream. Now I am awake from it.

Oh, I was just tired, so I fell into it.

Leave that;

hey, do you cook also?

No, I don't know how to cook, just a little bit.

Your father, you never talked about him much. Is he at home today?

Yeah, he's at home; I think he has a cold.

## THE WINTER HOLIADYS

We talked continuously until late at night because we both had already completed our sleep. She said it was 2 AM when we both ended up in the dark.

# Chapter 14

I went to the middle room; he was still sleeping. I glanced and went to the ground floor. There was only a sofa, a bathroom, and emptiness. I lay on the sofa. It was not comfortable; it was very hard to rest on it. I tried several times, but I failed; it was really hard to lie on it for a few minutes in a resting position.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

However, I got a small nap after all my hard tries. When I woke up, I went to the middle room to search for water. I entered the room; he was awake, his eyes were open, staring at the ceiling, but his body was lying at rest, like his eyes were the only alive part of his whole body.

“Do you know how to make green tea?” he asked with a very low voice and with a gap between each word. I nodded.

“I don’t know properly, but let me try,” I said.

I started to prepare it; he again corrected me whenever I took a wrong step. Finally, when I was done, I handed him the cup and held one too. Suddenly, he vomited very badly; the blanket turned red and yellow, his blood mixed in it, and his tea spilled too, turning it red as well.

He stood on his feet and started to walk downstairs.

“I’ll clean that all,” I said. Then I busied myself with cleaning; it was a very bad mess and looked totally unhealthy. I forgot to

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

drink my tea and spilled it into the kitchen dustbin. I don't know how, but it also looked red to me.

I cleaned all the stuff myself, but she also helped me from her balcony. It went fast. Then I prepared stew again, but this time she narrated to me how to make it. I filled two bowls with that, and with two spoons, I went downstairs; he was lying on the sofa. I handed him one bowl with one spoon and held the second in my hands tightly; it was hot and warming in this cold.

I made my place and leaned my head against the front wall of the sofa. We both tasted the stew. It was more immaculate than yesterday, more tasty and comforting.

"Do you ever think about your mother? She was also obsessed with cooking," he said. I didn't say anything; my focus was on the bowl and spoon.

"I think you," he said, taking a small pause. "Do you remember your mother's face?"

"She is pretty," I finally said while moving my spoon through my fingers.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I had forgotten her face; now her appearance was blank. I remained silent and focused on my silver spoon.

“Do you think your mother loved you?”

“Most,” I said.

Now he remained silent for a few minutes, then after a while, he said, “Never,” two times.

“You are not like your mother; neither am I; you are different, different from both of us.” I focused on my spoon; my focus went into its weight; it was light, very light. It was a silver spoon with beautiful patterns on it; many flowers and some leaves were the pattern with little dots everywhere.

“She was kind to everyone, wanted to solve everyone’s problems, help everyone like she helped me,” he said, taking a long pause.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

Now it's not looking like he is having a conversation with me. He is not waiting for me; he doesn't want any response; he is just saying to himself in the air.

I stared at my spoon; its width was wider at last and becoming narrow; it was designed very perfectly to hold and grip it. But its weight was different, not the same; actually, it had increased now.

"She helped me," he said and paused again to take one spoonful of stew. He nearly finished his bowl. "Never come again," he said, taking a long pause in between.

The spoon in my hands became heavier now and changed color.

"Not my son, left by a woman I don't know now, crying, in front of the door," I closed the door, it was winter... Heavy winter.

The unpleasant crying, sobbing, roaring made my ears hurt.

I opened the door and kept that kid inside. I tried to find her to give her the kid, but she disappeared somewhere that night.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

The silver spoon, its weight was now beyond imagination, more than I had power to hold; it fell from my fingers to the ground.

The sound of the striking silver to the floor made me feel alive. I stood and carried his and my bowl to the middle room to wash them.

“I didn’t become a burden on you,” he said.

“She never,” I found these two words repeating with very loud intensity in my whole body, inside every part.

I entered into middle room .

Dark.....dark...dark...

# Chapter 15

I flick my eyes; I am on my bed. I rub my eyes and then I realize my cheeks are wet and my eyes are too. I go downstairs, but he is not here. I scan the whole room with my eyes; there is only a key on the floor. His last words, "I didn't want to be a burden on you," strike me. I feel very heavy, and dizziness is breaking every part of me. I sit on the sofa and then lie down; there are questions coming at me continuously, attacking me, occupying all the space, and the answers I don't know. He probably knows. I question myself: he never returns. He went far with the answers to my questions. Is my mother alive? Where is she now? Some questions that I am avoiding are tormenting me. Why didn't she come? Everything looks blurry: the walls, the ceiling—everything is disappearing, losing its color and becoming colorless. After two days, I wait for him to return with my answers, but he doesn't. I am on that same sofa for two days, staring at the door, waiting for a sound, but there is stillness everywhere; the stairs have disappeared. It has become only a four-wall block cage, trapping me inside. I stand on my feet, using all the energy I have; my legs are barely capable of

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

holding my weight. I start to step toward the south because the stairs were present, but they have vanished now. When I get near them, they appear again. Finally, there is something to escape this darkness. I feel all my body parts separating from each other as I reach the middle room. There are no windows, no light—it is a closed block I am stuck in—the stairs have disappeared again. I lie on my bed after that; I barely remember what I did. The week is nearly over, but I am fixed. I drink water several times in the middle room. I open the fridge; there are some fruits. I take an apple and eat it. I finally realize the sun's rays on me from the windows, the windows I stared at for a long time. I go near my window and look outside. It is bright outside, totally opposite to the dull colors inside this house. A snowflake from the window touches my cheek; it is fresh, very alive—white, cold, and calming. The winter breeze comes too, along with the snowflake.

## Chapter 16

I look at that balcony straight across from my house. I look back, and the stairs have appeared again; I run towards them. I went onto the terrace, and when I entered, winter was in its final stage.

I look on the floor of the terrace; there were many papers attached to little stones. I count how many there are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Seven papers tied with stones beautifully. I step near one, carry it, detach it from the stone, and open it.

It reads:

Arden,

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

Good morning. Oh no, sorry, good afternoon or good night, whenever you are reading this. Take any one of these according to the time you are reading them.

Actually, you didn't come to the terrace; it has been 7 days, and previously, I also threw 6 letters. I think you have already read them or not because I forgot to mention the chronological order number on any, but this is the seventh.

It's a little awkward for me to write a letter, but I am getting used to it gradually with time. I also called your name several times, but there was no response, only serenity.

Again, I spend my day in my balcony looking at your terrace, but it's empty, looking uncommon and strange—very empty and dry without you.

Also, one more thing: my winter holidays were the prettiest winter holidays I ever had, full of contentment, and this balcony has become my favorite. But today is its last day, and tomorrow my family also return here, and my school will open regularly too.

I don't mind your absence perhaps you have gone somewhere, and if you are reading this, then there is no point because it means you are back at your terrace.

Gwen

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

It was written yesterday. I gaze at the house balcony for a long time. I give myself some time to realize it has been 7 days. I grab all the papers, sit on a chair with them, and start reading all of them one by one.

“She waits for me every day,” I say.

After reading each letter with all my patience and gazing at each word carefully, I finish all of them. I stand up from the chair to call Gwen, but then something strikes me: her parents are probably in the house. What if her father or mother comes instead of her? So I drop my voice and backtrack halfway.

She is probably in school currently. I sit on the chair again, staring at her letters; I read them again, and suddenly my gaze goes to the corner of the terrace where there is a blank paper—not hers, it is from my diary.

The morning becomes evening, and the cold breeze comes into existence with heavy acceleration. I stand up and carry that page; there is already a pen on the terrace. I start to write a reply to her letters, all replies on one page.

I think about how it comes, but then I start to concentrate on writing. My hands begin to shake; the cold air becomes colder. I complete it more quickly, and then I tie it with a stone in the same manner. There is something written on the backside of the paper. Suddenly, a large cold cough and then continuously three or four small coughs follow, causing the paper to fall from my

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

hand to the terrace floor. I hold it again, tie it fast, and throw it at her balcony. It reaches her balcony, first striking the wooden part of her balcony window, then falling onto her balcony floor.

I breathe a sigh of relief and go into the middle room with a blanket. I look in the fridge for something to eat, but it only has three apples and one banana. But the banana is already black, and when I cut into one apple, I see it has been eaten by insects inside. So I eat the remaining two. I rest with the blanket, and at night when she doesn't come to her balcony, I return to my balcony and start to write. I write all night and eventually... Dark... dark... dark...

# Chapter 17

Mom...

I was sleep yelling. I woke up, opened my eyes wide, and stared at her wristwatch of her .

The small red hand suddenly stopped moving, and I realized all the sounds in the room were made by it, and now there was silence. The medium-length hand was stuck between three and four, while the largest minute hand was at six.

“3:30,” I said.

Silence – it feels pleasant, and sometimes not; this time it wasn’t.

I momentarily ran my fingers over the paper I wrote at night to give her. I began to read it word by word in my mind, and after a few minutes, I started muttering all the words because that silence was horrible, and my own voice was the only thing refuge for me.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

After I finished reading, I freshened up and went to the terrace, holding the page with a very soft grip.

She was already there; she waved hi to me with a beautiful smile on her face. Her smile forced my lips to smile back. I waved hi to her.

We both witnessed each other's hands; we both were holding a paper. She had already tied hers with a stone and was ready to throw it, but my paper wasn't ready; it wasn't tied up with a stone to fly into the air.

She didn't say anything, just waited a moment watching me, and then she threw hers first. It landed in my hand; I caught it in the air. Her mother called her just after I caught her page. She gestured for me to wait, showing me two fingers sign, and went inside.

I detached the paper from the stone and started to attach my paper to it. When I was done, I started to read her page. It was the same page I threw to her yesterday.

There was nothing written on that side; it was the side I had written on. It was just filled with my words. I flipped to the second side, and there was something written that I found. I moved my chair because I wanted to read while sitting, so I left the page and repositioned my chair. It fell on the ground, probably last night due to the wind.

She came up again very quickly, very energetically, and smiling. I didn't say anything like she did, I think because of her parents.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I wanted to talk very much; maybe she too.

I simply targeted the stone towards her balcony and launched it into the air. It went into the air, dividing the fog and making a path through it. I felt sudden pain in my shoulder joint after launching it.

My eyes were focused on that single stone. It reached near her hands, almost touching, and bounced off them. Her hands came closer to it; I removed my focus from the stone and looked at her, her body moving forward to the stone outside her balcony. Her eyes met mine. In her eyes, I saw my own eyes—apology, fear, guilt; her face or my mother's face and darkness. It was my eyes, not hers; it was my reflection in her eyes.

She disappeared from her balcony, or I disappeared her. My legs lost all power to stand; I felt myself falling too. Screaming reached my ears, and then there was silence.

Dark...dark...dark...

## Chapter 18

Red sky... a round red circle in the middle... a fallen chair...  
My eyes are paining.

The balcony... She is unbalanced... Darkness.

My eyes are opening and closing. I close them. She is catching the stone thrown by me. I heard a small scream. It's becoming more and more clear now. I am hearing it again and again. She fell down. I stand in place and look at her in the balcony; it was empty. I run downstairs with all my speed. By the time I reach, I grab the key from the floor and try to open the gate. The key wasn't going inside, and my hands are shaking badly. I finally push it into the door lock. I open the lock and pull the gate inside.

It was stuck. It was stuck.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I step back and with full force, I strike my shoulder against the door; it was stuck badly. I tried many times. I look around to find something to break it, but there was nothing, and I feel empty. I punched, punched, and punched. I kicked it.

10 minutes

30 minutes

1 hour

2 hours

My fists are bleeding badly. I didn't realize when I started to shout, then cry, and then it converted into sobbing and muttering. I am punching it continuously, using all the energy I have. My body loses every bit of energy. My eyes went close.

I am lying on the black floor in darkness; it is so dark that I can't see myself. I lift my head straight; my mother is going toward a gate.

Mom! Wait for me!

I am unable to stand; I try to lift myself, but I can't. I try several times; she is not waiting. I start to crawl on my hands and knees. I speed up; I am going towards her, but it feels like the distance between us is constant; it's not reducing.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I speed up. Mom!

I try to stand again, but it is not happening. She touches the door handle. I push myself beyond my limits. She stands there holding the gate handle. She pushes the handle very little. There is light behind that gate: bright white lights and flowers on the floor behind it.

Mom!

She is pushing it slowly, and the light and view behind the door are becoming clearer. My eyes start to droop.

Mom! Don't leave me...

Don't leave me...

I am afraid...

She pushes the door completely; it is now fully open. Darkness vanishes from all corners. She steps to that side. She turns to me; her face has blood everywhere, many cuts; her lips are red and unshaped, totally different from before; her eyes... She says something, but it doesn't reach me, then she closes the door from that side.

Don't...

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

Leave....

It all becomes dark everywhere again. I am left alone in the dark. I push myself towards that gate. When I reach, I call, Mom!

What she said is, ‘You did it.’ She said, ‘I did it.’ I did it. I close my hands over my eyes to look; they are coated with blood. I did it.

I open my eyes. Gwen! I mutter, I did it. Her face is also fading from my mind; it is blank. I can’t imagine her or my mother; both are vanished. My eyes are closing.

After an hour...

What have you done, Arden?

I open... there is no one. I lean against the door.

How did she flip?

I look everywhere, then up to the ceiling; it’s coming from there, that ceiling.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

Is she alive?

I suddenly look back; there is no direction it is coming from. Door—it's coming from that this time. It's all haunting.

Arden, Gwen?

I stand and start to run upstairs; the floor is trying to pull me inside, inside them. I reach the stairs and start to run faster; I go into the middle room and cover myself with a blanket, totally covered.

Breathing heavily, crying and sobbing, regretting. I fold myself.

Both faces are not appearing now. Their smiles look haunting, not beautiful, totally blank—no face, totally plain, no eyes, no nose, nothing.

I remove the blanket from my head and put my head out. There is a gray diary near my head; I carry it and take the pen. I flip the pages to find a blank page; it is the last page of it; only the remaining blank. I write the truth I never accepted; I confess to myself. I close the diary with my tears inside it.

Sobbing, coughing, and darkness rise up inside.

Arden?

Arden?

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

It was from the left wall, the wall in front of me. I lean myself against the right wall with half a blanket.

What did you do?

Now from somewhere else.

Gwen?

From inside me, I realize, and then they increase their pace; it was coming from everywhere. From that blanket, I hold it and throw it downstairs;

everywhere, all laughing, smiling, enjoying. I start to throw every single object. I break all the things; the almirah falls on the fridge and then on the ground; its two doors on the left side got broken and detached from it. The upper one, which has always been locked, is also broken;

I step to see what's inside it. There are cloths, a white-colored female cloth, very old. I grab that; it is so soft. My mother, it's hers. I hold it in my hand.

That gate was open, the gate to the bright was open; I enter into it. There were many flower chains hovering from the sky, and the floor is blooming. I walk towards it; there was one big stair, not of normal size, but only one. I rise up; now I am up on it. I

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

found one soft flower chain part in my hands; I am holding it,  
and the chain is half hovering in the sky.

I tried to join both; it was higher, so I had to stand on my toes to  
do it; I did it. I tied up the Part in my hand to that .

I saw my mother, her white bright silhouette, totally refuging,  
and still.

I take one step towards her; she is near; I don't have to run, she  
is near.

I lay my head on her lap; it's registering silence, making me  
still.

I open my eyes; my legs are moving; I am hovering; my neck is  
Paining cracking .

I close my eyes and return; on her lap I close my eyes.

White... white... white...

THE WINTER HOLIADYS

Part

Two

Gwen

# Chapter 19

10 January  
11:00 PM

I am in the backseat of a car driven by my father. Looking outside the window, I never imagined myself like this, never.

"Are you okay?" my father asked.

"Yeah, Dad, I am okay.

It would take four to five days, and your two to three scars will vanish from your face.

No problem; it's not painful.

It takes seven days to recover, and now I am out of that hospital small room. In my sleepyhead, I look outside the window at all the lit-up buildings.

Colorful; this is how life should be, my father said.

"Yeah, colorful," I said in a lower tone.

"Want to sleep?"

"Yes, a long sleep, a long rest."

"Just five minutes more."

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

We finally reach home. I enter my room; all the mess was cleaned, but his given diaries were not on my bed. The room is totally clean. I lie on my bed and then suddenly stand up to find one of his diaries to read. I set his diary in chronological order and write numbering on the front cover; it helps to read. I am on his first diary; I am a really slow reader. We will finally meet tomorrow morning; he will be surprised. Also, tomorrow is my birthday; how could I forget? 11 January, my birthday. I read a little, and then I think it will be the last page, then I will read later and flip the page to the next.

Page:

Arden

It was midnight dark, a different kind of dark. I am in my little room; I look at all the things around me; they look at me too. They are very stable, very quiet, still unlike me. They are all dilapidated, but I am feeling more. The muttering sound from deep is killing me; I understand zero of it, but I never liked it, and I always found it miserable. I try to stop listening, and then it becomes louder in my ear; my brain never helps me, always betrays me like it's not mine. This is how I start writing on the same kind of night with this unpleasant sound when I found diaries and a lot of pens in my room's almirah drawer. I close my eyes to focus on sleep.

I mark the last page of his childhood; I am very interested in him; he is not normal, or his life is not. I also close my eyes to focus on sleep, but he is the only thing coming to mind.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

The morning

"Happy Birthday, little one!" My father came into my room; it's morning, the sun rays are coming from the balcony in the room, a tiny effect.

He turned the light on and kissed my forehead and again said in a low voice, "Happy birthday."

"Happy birthday!" my mom adds too from the kitchen.

"Happy birthday, little Gwen!" Uncle Vie!

I recognize him by his voice; my favorite and close uncle lives in California now.

"Uncle Vie, when did you come?"

"Today morning to wish you, my child."

"Oh, Uncle Vie!"

"Always for you, my dear."

"Okay, you both freshen up and come to dinner," Father adds and went back into the living room.

I freshen up and go to eat; my favorite meal was cooked, and then we all were together. Uncle Vie shared his long journey of enjoyment. He is a very knowledgeable person.

He forcefully pulled me to realis caelum , a very beautiful place known as the heaven of artists because only artists can live here and sell their art, and no one is allowed to live, only to explore. It's name realis caelum derive from two Latin words means real heaven . We enjoyed the whole day together; he told me about all the arts; he knew about everything literature, philosophy, arts , mythology to western science.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

We returned home when the sky became dark; he brought cake and all the stuff along the way. I always disliked celebrating my birthday; rather, I like to enjoy someone else's birthday.

We reached home and then the celebration, every corner filled with joy and beauty. I cut the cake; everything happened so fast—smiling and laughing suited every face.

I went into my room at 10 o'clock; I looked at the wall clock hanging on the wall. I started to continue his diary from where I left off last night. I read several pages and then reached where he mentioned the moment he noticed in my home; he also knew Uncle Vie already. Then I turned the page and thought that this was the last of this night .

That page:

I was on my terrace; I came to the terrace running for some purpose, and then suddenly I felt pain in my hands, and then I realized I punched my hand on the chair in an open-eye dream. I raised my head; she was in her balcony smiling.

Her smile forced a smile on my face, a pure smile. My happiest moment was a little strange; my happiest moment is not one in which I am laughing or jumping in excitement; it's just a smile, but it is worth considering the happiest. It was the happiest event I lived.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I marked that page and closed it.

I heard something like someone calling me; I am not sure if I actually heard it or not. I went to the balcony because I thought he was calling me. I glanced at the terrace; there was no one, not a single shadow.

Then I looked inside the middle room through his room window. There was stillness, the wind was blowing heavily, and then suddenly I saw some minor movement in that room; it was like a blink, so quick. I went to the farthest corner of the balcony to look more widely.

I looked there hanging... legs totally alive, non-active. I shouted...

## Chapter 20

Hey, where are you going!? My father asked.

I ran outside to the doorway, just coming; some friends came to wish me.

So, bring them here!

I ignored and ran outside; it was very cold, the winter breeze was blowing heavily. I ended up running and finally reached his road turn. I turned and started to run again; there were no questions and nothing in my mind, totally blank.

I reached in front of his house door; it was open but stuck, just like when I came at Christmas.

I found a huge brick and threw it at the door, but it didn't work; the brick was weak and broke into pieces. I looked around and there was a long iron stick; not iron, actually, but something heavy. I grabbed that and attacked the door with it. The door didn't open and eventually fell inside the house.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

I threw that iron bat and stepped inside; there was a white blanket on the stairs. I removed that from the way; the room was filled with an unpleasant smell. I went up the stairs, and there were many flies on the stairs. When I reached the middle room, I was stuck.

A lifeless dark figure was hanging from the ceiling fan by white cloth; it dominated all space.

The surroundings were lifeless, not interesting at all, filled with colorlessness.

His body was colorless, emotionless, not interesting in anything. The skin of his neck was totally black and reddish. Some flies were near him.

“Arden,” I said, frozen at the doorway, deriving my own thoughts.

I was shocked, eyes widened, filled with disbelief and horror, tears streaming silently down my cheeks and uncontrollable sobs.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

My trembling hands and each finger, my legs were rooted to the floor, paralyzed and unable to hold my weight.

Breathing became abnormal, with sharp gasps, rapid, as if the air had been sucked out of the room.

Struggling with myself, what I was seeing was something I had never thought of.

I was denying what I was seeing, calling him, calling his name again and again, expecting a reply, his sweet innocent voice in my ears.

“Arden .... Arden ....”

I stepped forward, one step towards him, and I felt something under my foot. I looked down to find a diary; I bent and held it in my hands.

I took my second step; it felt like a horrifying, realistic nightmare without an end.

I untied the cloth and brought him down while his face looked at me; my crying now had a sound, no longer silent.

Hard, loud crying while calling his name continuously.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

“Why?

How does a person look so much death and alive too?” In my thoughts, he was actively smiling at me.

My hands held his hands, motionless, without any flow.

I closed my eyes, my tears falling down my cheeks, then opened them. The tears dropped from my cheek to his eye, making their way to his cheek and then down to the floor.

He was crying too; we were both crying.

The phone rang with my father’s message; it popped up. I went to the terrace and replied.

The motions image came in front of me when I fell from the balcony. He threw the paper, and I was very excited because the last time he threw a page, one side had a poem, half incomplete about his loneliness, and I completed that poem and threw it back to him, very excited to see his reply about how I completed it. When I opened my eyes in the hospital, I was holding that page in my hands. I opened it, but there was nothing; it was different; there was no mention of it.

My glance went to that page of the poem in the corner of the terrace floor . He never read it.

## THE WINTER HOLIADYS

The chair was there, fallen on the ground. I went back; I took three or four steps, and then I heard a sound. I looked back; he was sitting in the chair, smiling, looking towards my balcony, writing something.

I stepped forward, and suddenly everything diffused into fog.

I went back into the middle room; my phone rang. I grabbed the diary and cut the call, then sent him a message.

“Coming...”

I called the police and went back, totally different with something heavy.

# Chapter 21

After 6 years

11 January

California, Palm Springs.

The incredible confluence of art, music, film, and architecture in Palm Springs is indescribable. I moved here with Uncle Vie after that night of my birthday. My parents were surprised by my decision, but I think it was the best way.

I completed my studies and am currently also pursuing a Master's in Psychology from the University of California. Living in paradise, Uncle Vie left; he died last year during spring, a peaceful death. He never married and gave me all he owned: a mansion with a huge garden and pond, where I am currently sitting on a chair. He used to sit here, looking down at the water for depth.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

My phone rings, and I am reading his (Arden) last diary entry that I took that night; it was the last page.

I answered the call; it's from the NGO I am working with. I give psychotherapy to children and teenagers. I said thanks for calling and ended the call; birthday wishes from the little children. I have become their older sister more than a psychotherapist.

I refocused on the last page; I just reached it.

The page:

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Arden

My hands are trembling; this was the first time my heart didn't want to write, but I am writing against it. Everything is becoming erratic, freakish, and grotesque. Now when I close my eyes, everything looks uncanny.

My eyes, what can I say to them? They always lie to me; I never saw her, I never saw my mother or Gwen, never. I can't see that long; everything is blurry.

My eyes and mind always betray me. I have been loved, loved by two, but I have never seen them. Therefore, they both look the same: beautiful, luminous, and ravishing.

But now when I think of both of them, their faces vanish in pain, totally blank, faceless. It is a curse.

I never saw, I never.

## THE WINTER HOLIADYS

He never saw me; this was the last page.

I looked into the pond's depth, and I see some pictures in it: a garden. I am little, very little, just five, holding my father's one figure. His hands are huge to me; my whole hand just grabs his one finger.

We are strolling. I always wondered why I had such a small size; out of curiosity, I asked my father in my sweet little voice,

"Dad, why am I so little, and why do my hands seem smaller than yours and mom's?"

"Oh, my little sweet Gweny, you think so much."

"I want an answer! Dad, why... why?"

"Okay, okay, my little , not only I and your mother, all parents have huge hands to protect their little divine creation from evils."

"How do evils look, Dad?" I asked with curiosity.

"Oh, little , evils do not always have a physical appearance. Some do, but those that don't are more evil: anxiety, depression, loneliness, stress, isolation, trauma, and many more. They are

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

invisible evils, and we, all parents, have big hands to protect our little angels from them."

"Dad, do you protect me?" I asked.

"Forever," he said, kissing my forehead.

"Do Ben's parents not have huge hands?" I

The phone rings again. I snatched the last paper from the diary and went into my room, my little cabin. The front wall above my bed is filled with his diary pages; I attached the last page to the wall too.

My gaze is drawn to one of the papers affixed to the center at wall.

During my childhood, I did not hold a belief in gods; I perceived them solely in the heavens. However, there came a day when I

## THE WINTER HOLIADYS

acknowledged their presence on that balcony and also within my closed eyes.

Arden

# AFTERWORD

The story of The Winter Holidays delves deeply into the silent battles fought within the hearts and minds of children and teenagers. While the narrative revolves around a fictional protagonist, it mirrors a reality faced by countless young individuals—the struggles against invisible evils like anxiety, depression, isolation, loneliness, stress, and trauma. These forces, though intangible, wield a devastating impact, especially during formative years.

In India, where over 15% of adolescents are estimated to experience mental health issues (according to a 2021 UNICEF report), these invisible evils remain largely misunderstood or ignored. Factors such as academic pressure, family expectations, societal norms, and even the lack of open dialogue about mental health create a breeding ground for these unseen adversaries. The stigma attached to seeking help often exacerbates the problem, leaving many young people to face their battles alone.

## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

It's critical to recognize these struggles as genuine and harmful, often more so than visible adversities. These evils don't break bones, but they shatter spirits, leaving scars that can take years to heal.

The Winter Holidays serves as a reminder that the battles we don't see are just as real as those we do. For every child and teenager grappling with these unseen evils, may this story be a testament to their resilience and a call to action for a more understanding world.

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## THE WINTER HOLIDAYS

By VIPIN RAI

## THE WINTER HOLIADYS